

**A Handbook for Implementing Acceleration Academies:
Using time to provide individualized academic support for each student**

**Clarence R. Edwards Middle School
Boston Public Schools**

**Amrita Sahni
Director of Instruction
asahni@boston.k12.ma.us**

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Introduction

The Edwards Middle School opens its doors during the Boston Public School vacation weeks in February and April in order to provide students with additional instructional time particularly focused on improving student MCAS performance. The February vacation week provides instruction in ELA in preparation for the ELA MCAS in April. The April vacation week provides instruction in Math in preparation for the Math MCAS in May. These weeks are known to the Edwards community as "Acceleration Academies."

Over 100 students are targeted by administration and teams of teachers to participate in each Acceleration Academy week. Previous MCAS test scores are closely examined along with current academic, behavioral, and emotional classroom performance. Once selected, these students are invited to attend Acceleration Academy and enrollment lists are generated from returned parent permission slips and parent phone calls. At the end of the vacation week, students who have perfect attendance and positive reports from teachers will receive a gift certificate to the local mall as an incentive and reward for their participation, hard work, and effort.

The Edwards Acceleration Academies significantly help the school reach the goal for making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which is the school's accountability measure to the district and state. Ultimately the goal is help student groups demonstrate proficiency in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Students who attend Acceleration Academies have shown a significant increase in MCAS performance. Acceleration Academies are an essential component to the school year and enable the Edwards to offer more intense, focused, and lengthened instructional time in order for their students to make significant learning gains in ELA and Math.

Using the Mass2020 framework identifying the six key principles of effective individualized academic support, this handbook will explain the Edwards Middle School's Acceleration Academy model. It includes detailed steps for school teams to follow in order to reach strong implementation levels of the six principles. Additionally, it will provide a view of these steps in practice and action at the Edwards. Ideally, this handbook will go beyond serving as a guide to school teams wanting to implement a similar model in their schools; it will more importantly demonstrate how time can be used by schools in a way to significantly impact student achievement. The Acceleration Academy model adds school time for targeted remediation delivered by highly qualified teachers to students who are grouped purposefully based on learning needs and compatibility, therefore increasing student achievement.

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Key Principle 1

Adequate time is provided for struggling students to get the additional academic support they need while maintaining a balance of academics and enrichment

Steps for Implementation

1. Review school calendar and determine consecutive time to program an “academy” week(s) concept.
2. Determine the focused content area(s) for the week(s).
3. After securing funding, determine if budget allows for more than one week offering. Within that week, determine if budget allows for a 4-day program or a 5-day program.
4. Based on funding, determine how many students can receive services during each week.
5. Create a daily schedule which includes time for breakfast, core instruction, a specialty class, and lunch.

In Practice at the Edwards

Boston Public Schools has two main vacation weeks during the second semester – a February vacation called “Winter Break” and in April called “Spring Break”. The Edwards designated February school vacation week to focus on the ELA content in preparation for the ELA MCAS which is typically administered in early April. The April vacation week focuses on Math since the Math MCAS falls in mid May. Each Acceleration Academy is four days long.

The Principal takes the lead with securing funding for the program through grant writing and development. Several costs are involved for Acceleration Academies which include:

- gift certificate per student to the local mall
- transportation (am and pm busses)
- meals (breakfast, lunch, and snack)
- classroom resources (curriculum that enables teachers to teach standards not necessarily covered through mandated district curriculum during traditional school year)
- classroom and instructional supplies for students and teachers
- personnel wages
 - 15 content area teachers (class sizes are kept small to ensure quality targeted instruction)
 - 2 specialty teachers (to provide students with art/health based classes during the week)
 - 2 full time administrators (principal and assistant principal)
 - 2 cafeteria workers (to help with preparation/serving of meals)
 - 1 secretary/logistics coordinator (to work the main office and operations)
 - 1 security school resource officer (to maintain school climate)
 - 1 custodian (to help with facility maintenance)

The daily schedule typically runs from 7:30 – 1:30 (either Monday-Thursday or Tuesday-Friday depending on scheduling issues). Within this time, four hours are devoted to instruction, one

hour for breakfast and lunch, and one hour for a specialty class (which serves as one hour planning and development time for teachers).

Sample Acceleration Academy Daily Schedule:

Edwards Middle School Acceleration Academy Schedule	
7:30 – 8:00	Bus Arrival & Breakfast
8:00 – 10:00	Block 1: Instruction in ELA (Feb) or Math (April)
10:00 – 11:00	Specialty (computers or gym)
11:00 – 11:30	Lunch
11:30 – 1:30	Block 1: Instruction in ELA (Feb) or Math (April)

Key Principle 2

Careful selection and flexible grouping of students takes place based on student needs and assessment data

Steps for Implementation

1. Designate key administrators to lead the process of organizing an “academy” week.
2. Key administrators meet with grade level teams to select students to participate in the ELA week and in the Math week. During the meetings:
 - a. Determine specific criteria for selecting students.
 - b. Use big picture data tools such as a sorted excel MCAS spreadsheets by performance level, student profile pages, or data boards to guide discussion. Start narrowing the focus for students within certain ranges. (refer to Edwards Middle School Academic League Handbook for detailed steps for creating spreadsheets, profile pages, and data boards)
 - c. Teachers should bring interim assessment data to meetings to review students in depth.
 - d. Using criteria, group students accordingly based on grade level and performance level.
 - e. Create a list of students to invite from each grade level team.
3. Send an invitation letter to parents requiring a permission slip to be returned to the school.

In Practice at the Edwards

The Principal and the Director of Instruction are the key leaders for programming Acceleration Academies. During the course of the school year, these administrators use data to inform the instructional decisions made for students and teachers during core content classes, academic support classes and enrichment based activities. Data is a key driving force to selecting students for Acceleration Academy.

The administration schedules ongoing meetings and conversations with teachers and grade level teams. At initial data meetings, the purpose and details of Acceleration Academy are shared with teachers in order to keep teams constantly thinking about students who will be a strong fit to attend Acceleration Academies. Following these meetings, a list of criteria will be distributed to all teams. During meetings with administration and during their own team meeting time, team leaders and grade level teams will submit a list of students for the administration to invite. The administration reviews the lists and meets with teachers and teams if any changes are necessary based on student information, data, and performance.

It is challenging to pick and choose students, because ideally all students can benefit from receiving the extra week of academic support. However, due to funding and a limited number of seats, the school must be strategic about the students who are selected. In addition to student grades, assessment data, and student profiles, below is a list of several other factors the Edwards uses as a framework when selecting students:

- Students with no (or very minor) behavior incidents
- Students with high attendance rates
- Students with observed parental involvement
- Students with strong motivation levels and investment in school
- Students with high stamina levels (and can handle four hours of one content area instruction)
- Students on the MCAS cusp levels (around 2-4 points above or below a CPI level)
- Students classified in specific AYP subgroups
- Students who work well with adults (and can work well with unfamiliar adult if the teacher is a visiting teacher)

Parent involvement in Acceleration Academies is critical. After students are selected, the administration sends an invitation letter to parents detailing the program. Parents are required to sign a permission slip and return it to school. Administration also attempts to talk to each parent on the phone prior to the week to answer questions about transportation and other details. The majority of parents involved are very willing to send their child to school during the vacation week. Parents appreciate the opportunity for their child to receive more instructional support to help them achieve on the MCAS. Parents have said the weeks are a good use of vacation time and because of the shorter day than the traditional school day, they feel their children get a nice blend of school time and home time.

Student Voice: 8th grade Math Acceleration Academy student

“What made the week exciting was the fact that I was learning new things every day. The lessons were easy and you weren't the only one learning - the teachers were learning as well because they had to keep you intrigued for a very long period of time. You got \$75 for going to the Acceleration Academies. You earn for going. It was an extra incentive for many kids to attend, like me. Now, in class, I do remember when my teacher went over stuff I learned at the Acceleration Academy. When she began to go over the things I already knew she was so confident that I was an Ace at the lesson that she let me teach it! I did, I taught every one of my classmates how to distribute the properties and why you would need it for future reference. They have told me I was one of the most improved for going to this Acceleration Academy and really I feel confident in what they say because I feel as if I improved enough to get me through a whole new grade!”

Key Principle 3

Classes are staffed with trained and experienced individuals who have the specific expertise to meet student needs

Steps for Implementation

1. Recruit and select high quality, results-driven teachers.
2. Based on teacher availability and certification areas of expertise and experience, school administrators can design courses and assign teachers to each course accordingly based on MCAS performance levels:
 - a. ELA Acceleration Academies
 - i. Low Warning
 - ii. High Warning
 - iii. Low Needs Improvement
 - iv. High Needs Improvement
 - b. Math
 - i. Low Warning
 - ii. High Warning
 - iii. Low Needs Improvement
 - iv. High Needs Improvement
3. If there is more than one class created within each class category, administrators can group students together based on standards and skills.
4. Hire quality specialty teachers to deliver engaging lessons in computer, gym, art or music.

In Practice at the Edwards

Highly talented teachers who are skilled at analyzing data and using data to inform instruction are selected to teach during this week. These teachers are mostly drawn from the best of the Edwards faculty, as well as from local and national schools. The administration conducts a national search from high quality teacher pools such as from the Teach For America alumni network. Locally, the search consists of recruiting the best teachers from Boston Public Schools and surrounding school districts. Before and during the week of teaching, visiting teachers have planning opportunities to work with teachers from the Edwards faculty and share best instructional practices. These “all-star” teachers are rewarded at the end of the week with a stipend and a certificate acknowledging their outstanding work and the incredible professional development opportunity they completed. It is referred to as the Clarence R. Edwards Middle School Teaching Fellowship Award which is known as a weeklong educational opportunity to demonstrate high quality teaching daily to students with academic needs and interact with school teacher leaders and administration.

The responsibilities of these teachers include:

- Collects and analyzes data in order to identify student strengths and weaknesses
- Uses data to inform instructional planning and delivery.

- Implements instructional activities that contribute to a climate where students are actively engaged in meaningful learning experiences.
- Identifies, selects, designs, and modifies instructional resources and curriculum to meet the needs of the students with varying backgrounds, learning styles, and special needs.
- Provides a positive environment in which students are encouraged to be actively engaged in the learning process.
- Collaborates with peers on common team to enhance the instructional environment.
- Models professional and ethical standards when dealing with students.
- Creates and achieves to meet short-term student performance goals.
- Demonstrates short-term gains in student performance.

Key Principle 4

Teaching complements core instruction by previewing, reviewing, reteaching and providing additional practice on specific standards and relevant application of knowledge.

Steps for Implementation

1. Teachers identify and create a curriculum that will supplement and enhance the core content area curriculum in one or more of the following ways:
 - a. Reviews previously taught standards.
 - b. Teaches standards not covered in the core content area curriculum / pacing guide.
 - c. Provides additional practice/enrichment opportunities with standards.
 - d. Introduces and teaches test taking strategies and skills.
2. Teachers create lesson plans that are tailored to meet the individual needs of the students in relation to strengths/weaknesses on selected standards.
3. Teachers deliver high quality lesson plans in an engaging way that builds student stamina and interest level for that content area.
4. Teachers use ongoing data (informal and formal) to inform lesson planning and delivery of instruction.

In Practice at the Edwards

The Edwards Acceleration Academies allow teachers the flexibility and autonomy to create a curriculum that is tailored to meet the needs of the students in their Acceleration Academy class. Time is available to delve into targeted standards at a deeper level and hone in on specific skills that students need more practice with. During these weeks, students also receive the help they need with basic test taking skills and strategies that will ultimately benefit them when they take the MCAS and other assessments.

Teachers tailor their assignments to the needs of the participating students. Teachers use student information from previous MCAS tests, results from benchmark assessments taken throughout the school year, and student class work to create a powerful curriculum designed to academically move each student forward. To further give students the personalized instructional attention they need, administration purposefully makes class sizes small. Class sizes range from 8-12 students, giving teachers the opportunity to work with students one-on-one, and giving students the opportunity to maximize their level of participation.

For example, an ELA teacher may choose to focus on poetry recognizing that there is limited time in the core ELA classes spent on poetry. Within the poetry unit, the teacher will include direct instruction on poetry vocabulary and then create a hands-on lesson where students can match sentence strips containing excerpts of poetry to the poetry term. Another unit may focus on skills and practice on writing an open response. In this unit, students will learn strategies for using a graphic organizer to outline an open response, analyze sample high quality open responses, and practice annotating an open response prompt in order to help the writer set a purpose.

Teacher Voice: 6th grade ELA Acceleration Academy Teacher

“During the traditional school year, many factors contribute to a lack of focus for many of our lower performing students. As they transition to middle school, the requirement to balance multiple homework assignments, simultaneous exams, and additional commitments to school activities proves to be an overwhelming experience for many students. The feeling that their academic goals are insurmountable detracts significantly from their ability to focus on concept mastery and ultimately affects their success on the MCAS exam. The intensive program over school breaks allows students to focus on one goal and one subject in an environment that is catered almost exclusively to their needs. This ability to set and reach achievable content-based goals, in addition to the financial incentive for the student participants, is a recipe for success.

Over the course of the one-week program, I witnessed incredible academic gains in each and every one of my students. Students who lacked both the necessary skills to master grade level content as well as the motivation to put in the necessary effort were provided with an environment conducive to success. The students who participated in this program were able to catch up to and, in many cases, surpass their peers in areas such as reading comprehension, making inferences, and open response composition. Students who typically refrained from raising their hands or participating in class became engaged, motivated, and committed to understanding the ELA content. This increased student engagement and motivation continued into my regular class periods long after the program ended.” – Emily Bryan

Key Principle 5

Continuous monitoring of student progress takes place to evaluate impact and adjust content and instructional strategies

Steps for Implementation

1. Administration should provide teachers with assessment data for their specific students in teacher-friendly formats that align student performance to the standards.
2. Provide other sources of data that will be helpful for teachers (i.e. student work samples, report cards, student profile pages)
3. Teachers should create student-friendly tracking forms that allow students to chart their own progress in regards to their learning and mastery of standards.

In Practice at the Edwards

The Director of Instruction provides a large amount of data resources for the teachers. In addition to MCAS data and item analysis, data from benchmark assessments in English Language Arts and mathematics that are aligned with Massachusetts instructional frameworks is also provided. Data is collected from various sources and is presented in a comprehensive format. Personal contacts are also facilitated between the core instructional teacher and the Acceleration Academy teacher. This leads to a rich source of student background information and learning styles for the Acceleration Academy teacher.

Teachers generally start the week with goal setting charts and activities. This allows students to invest in their own success and feel a sense of personal responsibility to achieve. A common theme is using a “My Chance At Success (MCAS)” chart. With this chart, students set goals about improvement on MCAS and set individual action steps to achieve those goals. See below for an example from Stephanie Crement, an ELA Acceleration Academy teacher:

My total MCAS scaled score for 2009 in ELA was _____. I earned a total of _____ raw score points. I received _____, _____, _____, _____ points on the open response questions, from a total of 16 points.

MCAS Performance Levels

Scaled Score Range	Performance Level
260 – 280	Advanced (A)
240 – 258	Proficient (P)
220 – 238	Needs Improvement (NI)
200 – 218	Warning (W)

My Performance Level is _____.

I need _____ points in order to score in the next category in 2010.

In order to do this, I have identified the following action steps:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Key Principle 6

Opportunities for communication and collaboration among teachers are built into the school schedule to allow for discussion of instructional practices and student needs

Steps for Implementation

1. Create a teacher schedule which includes time for common planning while students are in specialty.
2. Conduct walkthroughs to provide feedback and strategies to support quality of instruction.

In Practice at the Edwards

In the past, Edwards Acceleration Academy teachers have had common planning time with teachers in the same grade level. While students are in a specialty course, the teachers have time to individually plan as well as collaborate and share teaching strategies. These teacher teams are often diverse, and sometimes include a regular education teacher, a special education teacher, and an ESL teacher.

Results from 2007-2009

Edwards Middle School students' MCAS performance has improved each year that Acceleration Academies have been in place, indicating that they are a successful component in the school's goal to ensure that all student groups demonstrate proficiency and that the school is able to achieve AYP. Overall improvement on the MCAS has been dramatic. With the help of the extra boost students received during the Acceleration Academies, the school made Adequate Yearly Progress for both English Language Arts and Mathematics in the aggregate for the first time in Edwards standards-based testing history. It demonstrated improvement in both content areas across every single grade level from 2008 to 2009. For example, 6th grade ELA went from a 76% pass rate on the ELA MCAS in 2008 to 87% in 2009. Seventh grade Math went from a 62% pass rate in 2008 to a 74% pass rate in 2009. Eighth grade Math and ELA passing percentages both jumped by 5%. Successfully, the school reached more AYP targets (i.e. participation, performance, improvement, and attendance) than any other middle school in Boston Public Schools.

Deeper analysis around the students that participated in Acceleration Academies demonstrates the great impact of these two weeks as well. Last year was the first year the Academy was expanded for English Language Arts and 74 students were enrolled. A large difference is seen between students who participated in the ELA Acceleration Academy and those that did not. When looking specifically at the fifty-one students that are still attending the Edwards Middle School this year, thirty-eight, or 75%, grew at a faster rate than their state-wide peers with similar ELA MCAS scoring histories. In addition, the average student growth percentile for students participating in the 2009 ELA Acceleration Academy was 18.28 points higher than the average student growth percentile for those Edwards students who did not participate in the academy. Again, looking at those students currently enrolled at the Edwards, the scaled scores of those students participating in the ELA academy were on average 6.41 points higher than those of Edwards' students who did not participate. This is an increase equivalent to well over half of a performance level.

One student, a student with mild special needs, attended the ELA Acceleration Academy during February vacation of 2009. The previous year, she had earned a scaled score of 220 on the ELA MCAS test, a score bordering on failing. With the work she did during the Acceleration Academy, she was able to dramatically increase her performance, earning a scaled score of 244, a ranking of proficient. In addition, her growth percentile climbed dramatically. She outperformed 98% of her statewide peers with similar ELA MCAS scoring histories.

There are many success stories around Mathematics Acceleration Academy as well. Last year, the school was able to enroll 83 students in Math Academy. Again, when looking specifically at the forty-eight students that are still enrolled at the Edwards, 36, or 75%, grew at a higher rate than their statewide peers on the Math MCAS. Students that participated in the Math Acceleration Academy had an average student growth percentile 10 points higher than the average student growth percentile of those Edwards Middle School students who did not participate in the Academy. A current 7th grader made huge academic gains, going from the needs improvement to the proficient level. In the spring of 2008, she earned a scaled score of 232 on her Mathematics MCAS; in 2009, after attending the Math Acceleration Academy, she

earned a scaled score of 246. Her growth rate was faster than 91% of her statewide peers with similar scoring histories.

Moving Forward: Areas of Future Focus for the Edwards

This year the Edwards is looking forward to improving and expanding student reach with Acceleration Academies. Whereas the data demonstrates that Acceleration Academies are truly impactful, there are some steps the school can take to make these two weeks even better. In implementing the academies in the future, the school is setting a goal to increase the number of students served and for more participating students to reach proficiency and possibly even score at the advanced level. Also, the school will look to increase the percentage of special education and Latino students enrolled in both academies, as these subgroups are currently not making Adequate Yearly Progress.

To better meet these goals, the Edwards would like to make a number of implementation changes. First, it will begin to identify the students for the academies sooner, and with a lens for special needs students and students of Hispanic descent to more specifically address the achievement gaps. To bolster the efforts around mathematics, the school would like to bring on a mathematics coach to work with academy teachers to analyze student data and create better lessons for our students. Administrative support would allocate more time to working directly with kids and supporting teachers around instructional methodology. Finally, the Edwards would like to increase planning time for teachers so that the school can create more time for academy teachers to collaborate and share effective practices to improve the achievement of students.